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# Buxton mill clean-up nears completion

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PAGE ONE

BUXTON— Federal clean-up efforts at the Rogers Fibre Mill site have tripled in cost since the project began a year ago, but beyond some remaining soil contamination, the work is complete.

Bob Brandenstein, the former selectman still serving on the committee overseeing the project for the town, praised Environmental Protection Agency efforts at the site of the former mill building.

"I think the EPA has done a wonderful job," Brandenstein said this morning. "It has gone a lot further than we expected, and it didn't cost the town anything, which I am proud of."

Only a few tasks remain in the project, according to a report filed this month by Janis Tsang, the EPA's onsite coordinator. The only structure left standing is a power generating dam, which Central Maine Power Co. sold to Florida Light & Power this winter.

The cleanup efforts, originally estimated to cost \$1 million, have ended up costing \$3 million, with the price tag rising twice since the onset of abatement efforts, according to EPA reports.

Testing shows that roughly 500 cubic yards of contaminated soil still remain on site. Excavation and water treatment equipment have been removed, however, and the EPA will try other abatement methods than total removal, Tsang states.

"In light of the above...(the EPA) decided to evaluate alternative approaches to address the remaining sediment because it would be too costly to re-establish the de-watering and water treatment operations, ac-

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Robert Brandenstein

cess road and staging area for excavating the relatively small volume of sediment," Tsang wrote.

Brandenstein said the plan at this point is to remove at least the most contaminated sediment with a commercial vacuum truck, then cover the remaining soil with rock and concrete to prevent the spread of contaminants.

According to Tsang, creation of a wetland with vegetation could also help keep any contamination from spreading, but the EPA's remaining \$240,000 in the project's budget would not cover this.

"The environmental risk posed by the remaining contaminated sediment appeared to be relatively minimal," Tsang wrote. "...In light of the cost of wetland restoration, usage of stone cover for stabilizing the remaining sediment upon the removal of the gross contamination would be the most cost effective measure to address the remaining sediment."

Brandenstein praised the EPA efforts, and said he is confident the

■ MILL

Continued on Page 12

Cont'd

33

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From Page 10\

last contaminants on site are being properly addressed.

"The levels of contamination are not that extreme, and they are well back away from the waterway," he said. "I think we are comfortable with that."

The demolition and cleanup started last fall, and has grown in scope as the EPA's crew discovered higher levels of contaminants than expected.

Brandenstein said the town had little idea how much pollution had taken place at the site over the years.

"At the beginning, I was mainly worried about physical hazards to children at the site," Brandenstein

said. "We knew there was contamination there, but we had no idea how much."

In the basement of the building, large drums of chemicals used for various manufacturing enterprises over the years had to be removed. Asbestos abatement was a large part of the project as was sediment removal.

A red dye substance was also discovered both in the building and in the area sediment.

The dye, which is believed to have seeped into the river over the years, was caustic, causing irritation to one cleanup worker's skin when he came in contact with it last winter.

As the scope of the project grew, so did its federal budget. The price was raised to \$2 million in the fall, and went up to \$3 million in the winter. The report states that

\$2,845,000 has been spent, and the remainder will pay for abatement of the sediment contamination.

For Brandenstein, the project's closure will put to rest years of debate and concern by town citizens.

The town almost chose to do the demolition project itself, before the true extent of necessary work was known. The EPA became involved, however, when the Board of Selectman, which included Brandenstein at the time, sent a letter about the mill to Senator Olympia Snowe in 1997.

"They did an inspection after that, and discovered the asbestos, and it has been an EPA project ever since," Brandenstein said.

"I am sure it is also a relief to the towns downstream who get their water from the river," he said. "I am very pleased."